Battery Cage Outrage

An HSUS undercover investigation reveals the appalling reality inside the facilities of the nation's top egg producers

In battery-cage factory farms, proper animal care isn't possible, says an HSUS investigator. Workers are pushed to move at top speeds, and handling is extremely rough. Hens whose feet become trapped in the wire cages often go unnoticed and slowly starve. "They would put one worker in charge of a barn with 300,000 birds," he says. "How is one worker who doesn't even have animal care training going to take care of 300,000 birds? Not possible."

Working 10-hour shifts at a series of Iowa factory farms last winter, an HSUS undercover investigator witnessed the horrors of industrialized egg production. Hens were stacked in cages as far as the eye could see, and the ammonia-laden air burned his throat and lungs. Every day, he removed decomposing bodies from cages and handled birds with prolapsed uteruses, broken bones, and abscesses that would never be treated.

Over the 25 days he was employed at the facilities, he also saw animals who had escaped the cages and plunged into the manure pits beneath the warehouse-like sheds, where they would languish before perishing from thirst or hunger. At the end of each workday, he documented what he had witnessed, logged video footage, then grabbed a few hours of sleep before it was time to do it all again.

"I've seen some terrible things in my undercover experience, but nothing even begins to compare to these battery cage facilities," the investigator says.

Operated by Rose Acre Farms and Rembrandt Enterprises, the nation's second and third largest egg producers, the four farms he worked at collectively confine about 10 million egg-laying hens in barren wire cages so restrictive the animals can't spread their wings, nest, preen, or perform other instinctive behaviors—a constant frustration that's compounded by the chronic physical pain many of them endure.

After 18 months of intensive egg laying and horrific confinement, hens are left "hollow shells" of birds, the investigator says. At Rose Acre's facilities, the scrawny, defeated, featherless creatures are yanked from cages, suffocated in gas carts, and ground up for chicken byproducts. Rembrandt trucks spent hens to a Minnesota slaughter plant, where they're turned into low-grade meat. The cycle begins anew when a new crop of birds fills empty cages.

THE HSUS

From handling to housing to the disposal of spent hens, the investigator documented cruelty in all phases of the miserable life cycle of a battery-caged chicken. Sadly, the findings are typical of battery-cage operations, which confine nearly 270 million birds in the U.S.—95 percent of the nation's egg-laying hens.

"Animals simply cannot be properly cared for in facilities of this size and type," says HSUS president and CEO Wayne Pacelle. "There is a cage-free alternative, and switching to it should be a minimum moral imperative for the industry."

But some producers have responded to growing public opposition to these abuses with blatant whitewashing. Rose Acre Farms brands itself as "the Good Egg People," and its website assures that its "hens are happy at all times." The man who spent two weeks at three Rose Acre facilities counters: "The hens' welfare is not even a low priority; it's not a priority at all. If a bird is injured or crippled or sick or dying, basically the policy is to ignore her until she's dead."

Such consumer deception may extend beyond the ranks of individual egg producers: In April, The HSUS asked the U.S. Department of Justice to open a criminal investigation of the nation's largest egg trade association and its member producers for alleged price fixing. The allegations are based on information from an industry insider, which asserts that the United Egg Producers' woefully inadequate "animal husbandry guidelines" were a pretext for a coordinated scheme to fix prices and increase profits at the expense of both animals and consumers.

The growing cracks in the egg industry could push more retailers to move away from eggs produced in intensive confinement facilities and pressure more companies to rethink the battery cage system. "In the long term, I hope that the industry stops trying to say that this cruelty isn't routine, because they know it is," the investigator says. "And that they understand that this isn't in sync with how the public wants to get their eggs." — ***Julie Falconer***

FIND OUT what you can do at *humanesociety.org/farm.*

Speaking Up for the Scapegoat

Unfairly blamed for dwindling salmon populations, sea lions are paying the ultimate price

Julie Farris stood on the bank of the lower Columbia River, watching a pair of sea lions as they cavorted in the water and swam nose to nose. Each spring, small troops of these charismatic pinnipeds swim more than 140 miles inland from the Pacific Coast to congregate at the river's Bonneville Dam, where they sun themselves, play and splash around, and feast on salmon waiting to navigate the dam's fish ladder as they head upriver to spawn.

A volunteer for the Sea Lion Defense Brigade, Farris also kept an eye on the steel-barred traps positioned along a retaining wall at the dam—set out for sea lions targeted by state wildlife officials, who claim the animals are taking too big a bite out of the salmon running the stretch of water between Oregon and Washington states. Around 8 p.m. that March evening, the sea lions Farris was watching hauled themselves out of the river along with a second pair to rest in the flat, comfortable space afforded by the traps. Farris had often used an air horn to scare the animals away, but this time they ignored her and began murmuring and settling in for the night.

Under cover of darkness, a vehicle slowly pulled up, headlights dimmed. A chorus of frantic barks soon followed, and Farris realized the gates of the traps had been slammed shut, the creatures trapped inside. The next morning, she and fellow volunteer Bethanie O'Driscoll watched as Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife boats arrived and men began piling onto the traps. One jabbed inside with a long pole or spear, O'Driscoll says, eliciting yelps and cries from the sea lions. "I had never heard them make that sound before—the way a dog sounds when it's injured."

There was no sign of two of the sea lions, while the other two were shoved into cages on a transport boat and led away. Catching a glimpse inside one of the cages, O'Driscoll saw the animal "could hardly move; the cage was so small compared to his size. He was looking out at the water and at the bank and at me. He was terrified."

The sea lions, whom volunteers had named Avatar and Ricky, were later killed, the seventh and eighth victims this year targeted for the crime of eating their natural diet. Bowing to pressure from sport, commercial, and tribal fishing interests that view sea lions as competition for threatened and endangered salmon stocks, the National Marine Fisheries Service in 2008 authorized Oregon, Washington, and Idaho to kill up to 425 California sea lions over five years. As of mid-April, at least 21 have been killed and 10 others hauled off to zoos; at least seven sea lions have died in trapping mishaps, including two Steller sea lions—a species that is technically protected due to its threatened status.

The states are exploiting a loophole in a federal law that would otherwise protect California sea lions, claiming they have a significant negative impact on endangered and threatened salmon. The HSUS has been fighting to end the trapping—citing far greater threats such as overfishing and habitat-disrupting dams—and is awaiting an appeals court ruling that will decide the fate of these native animals.

"The agency is trying to have it both ways," says HSUS staff attorney Sarah Uhlemann. "They can't say that fishermen and dams are having no significant effect on salmon populations, but then turn

around and claim the sky is falling because of sea lions—who naturally eat a much smaller percentage of fish."

The government's own estimates show that sea lions consume just 0.4 to 4.2 percent of the total spring salmon run. Yet officials have set low criteria for their "hit list" of specific sea lions to be captured or killed. Even when they are employing noise aversion, rubber bullets, and other nonlethal harassment techniques to encourage the sea lions to move on, they still target those who have been seen eating just one salmon and visiting the dam for five days.

Meanwhile, other threats deemed "not significant" by government agencies—including nonnative walleye and bass released into waterways for sportfishing—take a much bigger toll. Hydropower dams alone kill up to 60 percent of juveniles and 17 percent of adults from endangered salmon species. Nick Gayeski, a fishery scientist with the Wild Fish Conservancy, says dams impede adult salmon's path upriver, while turbines can suck in juveniles swimming downstream and grind them up. The warm, slow-moving bodies of water at the top of dams create a deadly environment for the fast-swimming, coldwater fish.

After The HSUS filed its lawsuit, 10 sportfishing groups submitted court briefs in support of the sea lion killings. But some fishermen take a more enlightened view. Zeke Grader, executive director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, says the scapegoating of sea lions is a way to avoid responsibility for problems created by dams and the diversion of water for agriculture. "The dams in a sense have created these convenient fishing holes for these sea lions," he says, adding, "I don't think the sea lions have been the demise of the salmon."

But the double standard remains. Even as they were spending tax dollars on the senseless cull, state agencies increased fishing quotas from 9 percent of the salmon run in 2007 to 16 percent in 2010. O'Driscoll, who lives on the banks of the Columbia, says it's not uncommon to see recreational fishing boats lined up "from shore to shore, just the whole river clogged with them. I can count 1,000 of them just from my window, and it's like that up and down the river." She also sees commercial boats using huge nets that are indiscriminate in their catch.

State wildlife officials have been trapping California sea lions at Bonneville Dam and taking them away to be killed. After being decimated by decades of bounty hunting, sea lion numbers rebounded with the passage of the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 1972. But now the states are exploiting a loophole in the law to carry out the trapping.

The landscape around O'Driscoll's home teems with abundant signs of wildlife—an osprey swooping down to pluck a fish from the murky blue, a trout jumping to gobble an insect in midair. Mink dart in and out of riverbank vegetation, brown pelicans bob in the slow current, and river otters float by on their backs. Every spring, sea lions are an integral part of the scene, circling and following O'Driscoll as she makes early morning visits in her kayak, or lounging nearby and staring back at her as she sits on the dock.

Over the 10 years she's lived on the river, she has come to recognize several sea lions by sight. Two in particular, C578 and C579—known by the numbers burned into their backsides—sometimes used to follow her around like fellow travelers saying "hello." They were never seen far apart; "it's obvious that they cared about each other and loved each other," O'Driscoll says.

Last spring, they climbed up onto a dock at Bonneville Dam to sun themselves and were caught in a trap. It was a devastating loss for O'Driscoll, a reminder that for her, the stakes in this fight are intensely personal. "It feels like they are killing my neighbor."

— Ruthanne Johnson

Sea lions often gather on docks and rocky outcrops for group sunning sessions, laying their flippers across each other's bodies. As they surf the waves, their glistening forms make graceful twists, turns, and dives. The bits of food they leave behind nourish other species, and their waste helps fertilize their watery habitat.

OPPOSITE PAGE: NORBERT WU/MINDEN. THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: DON RYAN/AP; BETHANIE O'DRISCOLL

"When you're helping the animals, you're helping the people. ... They're proud that they have a way to get their animal taken care of," says veterinarian John Mauterer, shown with veterinary technician Monica Arnold.

Tent Revival

A free veterinary clinic helps church minister to needy New Orleans residents

The people lining up in a parking lot on St. Charles Avenue one Saturday a month usually have little to call their own. Many in the underserved, inner-city neighborhood lack cars and show up on foot. Some forgo even basic necessities for themselves. A few live under an interstate bridge or spend nights at a nearby shelter.

But these down-on-their-luck New Orleanians have unshakable connections with at least one kind of earthly attachment: their pets.

"They're like everything to them," John Mauterer says.

It's that strong bond that helps Mauterer and his wife, Deb, care for four-legged patients while also ministering to those at the other end of the leash. As members of Church of the King, the two veterinary surgeons are joined in a broader health outreach initiative by volunteers who provide medical and dental services to low-income residents.

"You walk past the people that live under that bridge, and most people are scared of them, or write them off, or think they're not worth talking about—just avoid them," says Mauterer. "Our purpose here is for everybody who feels that the world calls them insignificant, not worthy, not good enough, not rich enough, not anything enough—we're here to tell them that they are significant, and that's what the love of God is."

At a recent Saturday event under the tent where the Mauterers vaccinated and treated 91 animals, HSUS and Louisiana SPCA volunteers spoke with pet owners about spaying and neutering; The HSUS has been helping expand and promote spay/neuter services in the region since 2007.

Two of the patients, pit bulls belonging to a neighborhood barber, received vaccinations, heartworm preventative, and flea and tick treatment; one was treated for a severe skin condition. "The owner was so proud when he finished and bragged to me about the medication he received. He was relieved he would be able to make his dog feel better," says Amanda Arrington, HSUS manager of spay/neuter initiatives.

The HSUS's collaboration with both local shelters and religious groups is all part of a larger campaign to curtail pet homelessness and strengthen respect for animals. The work of Church of the King and its nonprofit ministry, the New Orleans Dream Center, can help serve as a model for congregations nationwide, says HSUS Faith Outreach Campaign director Christine Gutleben.

"They're showing that human care involves animal care. You can't separate them, and there's no community that can say this more clearly and knows this better than New Orleans," she says.

The Mauterers recently sold their 24-hour clinic so they could devote themselves to volunteer efforts, which also include mission work providing free treatment for animals in Africa, Asia, and South America. "To use your profession for something you really believe in is an unbelievable gift in itself. … Work is no longer work when you really have a passion for it," Mauterer says.

That sentiment reflects the ministry philosophy at Church of the King, says the Rev. Randy Craighead, executive pastor. "If we can show [people] that we're even interested in their pets," he says, "they can see that we're interested in them as a *whole* person—body, soul, and spirit—and all their attachments." ***— Jim Baker***

WATCH A VIDEO about The HSUS's Faith Outreach Campaign at *humanesociety.org/magazine.*

Putting Their Stamp On It

The U.S. Postal Service's latest set of social awareness stamps features adopted cats and dogs along with the words "Animal Rescue: Adopt a Shelter Pet." During the campaign, Ellen DeGeneres and the pet products company she co-owns, Halo, Purely for Pets, are promoting the stamps and pledging to donate a million servings of Halo-brand dog and cat food to U.S. shelters. To order stamps, an adoption certificate, or related merchandise, visit *stampstotherescue.com.*

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: SEAN GARDNER; SALLY ANDERSON-BRUCE. OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: COURTESY OF REP. DANNY DAVIS; KAREN HOYT

U.S. Rep. Danny Davis

A Friend in Congress for Dogs

A recent Pit Bull Training Team class hosted a special guest when U.S. Rep. Danny Davis, D-Ill., showed up to witness the program's transformative effect on at-risk youth.

Part of The HSUS's End Dogfighting campaign in Chicago and Atlanta, the agility and obedience classes are helping "a whole new generation not to fight their dogs," says HSUS director of urban outreach Tio Hardiman. Enlisted by reformed dogfighters, many young recruits are now enthusiastic pit bull advocates.

A longtime friend of Hardiman's, Davis is considering a presentation on the topic to the Congressional Black Caucus. Reaching African-American leaders is critical because of the prevalence of dogfighting in underserved minority communities, says Laurie Maxwell, deputy manager of the End Dogfighting campaign: "Where people are suffering, animals are suffering, too."

Davis recently shared his observations with The HSUS's James Hettinger.

Q: What were your impressions of the Pit Bull Training Team class?

DAVIS: I'm a person who believes that people live what they learn. I also believe that an idle mind is the devil's workshop, and that many young people who don't have lots of hobbies ... often get trapped in lifestyles that become violent. I was impressed with the interaction of these young people learning to understand, train, and care for these pit bulls. I think they were seeing them, or beginning to see them, as friends.

Q: What were your early experiences with animals?

DAVIS: I grew up during the era when people used animals to work. My parents were sharecroppers, and so our mules and horses—you took care of them because they were part of your economy. You had to keep them well so that they could contribute. And so you learned early on that they were valuable. Then of course there were other animals that became pets ... and there were those that were used for food. Well, I never did like being around the ones that were being slaughtered. I would try to make myself as scarce as I could.

On the verge of engaging his dog Elmo in a fight, 12-year-old Terrence Murphy of Chicago was recruited by an anti-dogfighting advocate to enroll in an HSUS pit bull training class. Elmo went on to earn a Canine Good Citizen certificate. "Instead of teaching him the wrong thing, to go out there and kill other dogs, I was teaching him the right thing—to encourage him to be a good dog," Terrence says of the experience.

And I do recall as a kid, my 4-H club project one year was to raise 100 chickens, and they used to follow me around everywhere because I'd feed them. And I jumped out of the crib and [accidentally] broke one's neck. That kind of hurt me, but I had heard of a splint. So I got a little piece of wood and tied it to the chicken's neck, and put some cold oil and stuff on there. And the chicken lived—but she always walked sideways—and actually grew to be a full-grown chick, and I was very proud of that.

Q: Why are you interested in sharing this with the Congressional Black Caucus?

DAVIS: If you can reduce violence in any way, shape, form, or fashion, then I think that's a good thing. In the process, if you can also help individuals understand that animals should be treated a certain way, then that adds another dimension ... and it's a combined good thing.